

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES  
CONFERENCE DES EGLISES EUROPEENNES  
KONFERENZ EUROPÄISCHER KIRCHEN

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**Final Declaration**  
**by the Consultation of Theological Faculties and Educational Institutions in Europe**  
**"The Future of Theology"**  
**Graz, 4-7 July 2002**

*"We commit ourselves...to promote ecumenical  
openness and co-operation in Christian education,  
and in theological training, continuing education  
and research." (Charta Oecumenica, II, 3)*

At the invitation of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Karl Franz University of Graz, Austria, more than 60 representatives of theological faculties and theological education officers of Christian churches in 24 European countries gathered at the Mariatrost Educational Centre in Graz from 4 to 7 July 2002, to consult together on the future of theology and theological education. Delegates were present from the representative Christian confessions, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches and the traditions of the Reformation. The delegates and guests received a cordial welcome from the Austrian province of Styria and city of Graz at a joint reception with their usual ecumenical openness.

In the Aula of the University of Graz, introductions to the consultation theme were given by Dr. Egon Kapellari, Bishop of Graz-Seckau, Bishop Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter of Holstein-Lübeck, Germany, and Dr. Michael Staikos, Metropolitan of Austria. They discussed the confessional, ecumenical and pluralistic aspects of theological education in the European context and offered important stimuli for the work of the consultation. They made explicit the close connection between spiritual leadership and theology in the church of Jesus Christ.

As the consultation continued, papers were given on the relationship between theology and religious studies by Prof. Konstantin Delikonstantis of Athens and Prof. Sven Erik Brodd of Uppsala, Sweden, and on the academic and professional education of theological students by Prof. Duncan Forrester of Edinburgh, Scotland, and Prof. Michael Beintker of Münster, Germany. It was emphasised that religious studies cannot take the place of theology, and that theology should exercise its critical function, among others, with regard to church and society. Five workshops dealt with the following current themes: ecumenical training and further education, gender issues in theological education, joint research projects, assuring quality in theological education, and academic grade structures. The Bologna Resolutions adopted in 1999 by European ministers of

education and cultural affairs, and their repercussions on academic life, especially theology, were critically examined.

In discussing these issues, the necessity and the value of stronger cooperation among theological faculties, colleges and institutions across national and confessional lines became evident. Student and teacher exchanges, and the integration of ecumenical learning into theological education, are indispensable for the future of Europe's churches. Discussion of ecumenical issues, and just getting to know one another better as different churches and confessions - from the viewpoint of each one's own self-concept - were seen as essential. It is not enough to hold isolated special ecumenical events; rather, all classes and lectures should be stimulated and imbued with ecumenical thinking. Encounters and study trips are very important in promoting ecumenical concerns. In the new Europe in process of integration, a common Christian voice, even when not a uniform one, needs to be heard. Theological educational institutions can give significant guidance on current ethical and social-ethical issues and also contribute by demonstrating possibilities for action.

The response from theological faculties, colleges and institutes of Christian churches in Europe, coming to Graz from almost every part of Europe in their ecclesiastical and confessional diversity, was gratifyingly large. There was an impressive intensity in the consultations and discussions, both in plenary and in group sessions, showing how seriously the representatives of theological studies take their responsibility. This was also in evidence in common prayer services and listening together to the Word from the Holy Scriptures.

The need to work together in an ecumenical spirit was expressed over and over, along with the wish that this initiative might be continued and intensified. Graz and its Faculty of Theology were mentioned as a possible place for coordinating the ongoing work, especially because of its geographical location at the intersection of eastern and western, northern and southern Europe, and its many years of diverse ecumenical experience. The planning group for this year's consultation will continue to be responsible for carrying on this work

In addition, the following concrete steps toward continuing and promoting intensive cooperation were named: convening of Europe-wide consultations on theological issues and education, regularly every two to three years; setting up partnerships between different educational institutions independently of the confessional ties of each; and finally, as a long-range goal, creation of an Ecumenical Conference of European Theological Faculties, Colleges and Institutions. Such intensive work together can make a valuable contribution to the future fellowship among the churches and peoples of Europe.

Graz, 6 July 2002